DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 405 468 CE 073 661

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TITLE Workforce Development Success through Community, Business, and School Partnership.
PUB DATE Mar 97
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Youth-at-Risk Conference (Savannah, GA, March 2-4, 1997).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Education Work Relationship; *Employment Programs; High Risk Students; High Schools; Institutional Cooperation; *Job Training; Late Adolescents; Outcomes of Education; *Partnerships in Education; Program Effectiveness; *School Business Relationship; Youth Programs
IDENTIFIERS *Michigan (Benton Harbor)

ABSTRACT

A cooperative program in Benton Harbor, Michigan, joins schools, businesses, nonprofit organizations, and a university to address local work force issues and needs identified by area employers and to place program graduates in jobs with a livable wage in an area of high unemployment and crime. The program consists of two major instructional components: (1) a job-specific applied skills program accomplished through self-paced, multimedia, interactive computer-based lessons; and (2) a life skills seminar designed to develop work maturity and life-coping skills needed to maintain employment. In addition to instruction, the following services are provided to participants: assessment, counseling, mentoring, resume writing, referral, placement, follow-up, and continuing education. Following the first year of operation, 182 participants had completed the 12-week program, and 132 had been placed in jobs with average wages of $7 per hour with fringe benefits. The work retention rate is about 80 percent, with some program completers having been employed for more than a year. Many are recent high-school graduates from at-risk environments who were unable to get jobs before participating in the program. Factors in the program's success include commitment, administrative style, staffing, environment, and the curricular and instructional process. (Contains 15 references.) (KC)

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ED 405 468

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SUCCESS THROUGH COMMUNITY, BUSINESS, AND SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP

A Presentation for the

Youth-At-Risk Conference

March 2-4, 1997

Savannah, Georgia

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Workforce Development Success through Community, Business, and School Partnership

Abstract

The Benton Harbor Workforce Skill Development Program is a collaborative effort between Benton Harbor Area Schools, City of Benton Harbor, Cornerstone Alliance, and Andrews University which provides the instructional/counseling staff. The program is funded by a $461,000 grant from the Michigan Jobs Commission with matching contributions of about $200,000 and in-kind services from the City of Benton Harbor and Cornerstone Alliance.

The program goal is to address local workforce issues and needs identified by area employers and to place program graduates in jobs with a livable wage. The program targets Berrien County with an emphasis in the Benton Harbor area which has some of the highest per capita national rates related to crime, unemployment, unwed mothers, those on welfare, drug usage, etc. Demographic indicators place almost all the youth who are in this program in an at-risk category.

The Program has two major instructional components. The first is in job-specific applied skills and is accomplished through a self-paced, multi-media, interactive computer based program titled: *Job Skill Education Program* (JSEP). The second component is a Life Skills Seminar designed to develop work maturity and life-coping skills needed to maintain employment. These seminars used materials developed by Adkins, of Columbia University in combination with materials and exercises developed by the center's instructional and counseling staff. Employers have committed jobs to those who successfully complete the program. Services provided participants in addition to instruction include: Assessment, Counseling (career and personal), Mentoring, Resume Writing, Referral Service, Placement in Full-time Positions, 90-day Follow-up, and Continued Educational Opportunities.

As of October 1996 following the first year of operation, 182 participants had completed the 12 week program with 132 placed (with more being placed) in jobs that have average wages of about $7 00 per hour with reasonable fringe benefits. The work retention is about 80 percent and some have now been employed over one year. Many are recent high-school graduates from at-risk environments who were unable to get jobs before participating in the program.

Introduction and Related Literature

At-risk people need help in sorting out and interpreting the life they are living. Decisions must be made on how schools and agencies are going to reach and teach those at-risk the competencies needed to improve their lifestyle; how they can help improve their neighborhoods; and, how they can help bring positive change to their community. One role of schools and agencies is to engage at-risk persons in establishing responsible and productive relationships with their community.

A number of people have commented on the culture of organizations. Schein's perspective (1985) on culture emanated from the belief that organizational cultures are created by leaders and one of the most decisive functions of leadership may well be the creation, the management, and if and when it may become necessary, the destruction of the culture. Culture and leadership, when examined closely, are found to be two sides of the same coin, and neither can be understood without the other.

Agencies, like schools and other organizations, are a cultural phenomenon. As is true of all social institutions, agencies have their own culture. In dynamic agencies, it appears that the culture permits staff to take an active, responsible role for the well-being of the whole agency as well as the clients. In this culture context the Benton Harbor Workforce Skill Development Program strives for a caring and supportive growth environment for both participants and staff.

Wehlage (1983) asserted that five principles must guide state and district policy for traditional comprehensive high schools in order for them to become substantially more effective in diminishing their at-risk and dropout rates. This statement also has validity for agencies. These principles are:

1. the need to have good information about students.
2. the need to have good information about the effects of school policies and practices on at-risk students.
3. the recognition that personal and small environments are more likely to produce membership and educational engagement for at-risk students.
4. the recognition that more of the same kind of curriculum and teaching is not likely to succeed with at-risk students.
5. the need to have a mechanism that will hold institutions accountable for success with at-risk students.

An analysis of the program reveals that each of the five factors identified by Wehlage are included in one or more of the fourteen characteristics (found in the section titled "How and Why Did the Program Succeed") identified as essential to the program's success.

Comer (1988) studied poor minority children and postulated that all children can learn in a school that is designed for success. Success, he stated, depends on linking the home and the school experiences through a program built in the schools so that children do not have to choose between conflicting values. Children imitate the actions, attitudes, and values of adults with whom they form strong bonds. His model emanated from the belief that when communities define their own problems and succeed in creating viable solutions, empowerment also results.

The Benton Harbor Workforce Development Center has taken to heart the concepts expressed by Comer but with an older age group. It was demonstrated that past poor school achievement can be overcome given the right learning environment; thus, providing the basic education and attitudes needed to acquire and hold a meaningful job. Not only children but youth and adults imitate the actions, attitudes, and values of adults with whom they form strong bonds. The Center has provided participants opportunities for role modeling and assistance in learning how to define their own problems in ways that help find creative and empowering solutions. The successful approaches used by the center to help participants develop problem solving life skills were in part based on materials developed by Adkins (1985).

The materials used by the center that were developed by Adkins (1985) are based on his pioneering work in the field of career development. Adkins developed, through a systems approach, a detailed assessment of psycho social problems as they impacted career choice and decision-making in at-risk populations. His research revealed that most non-traditional educational centers have several curricular tracks. Usually, these tracks include basic skills, some type of prevocational or vocational training, and GED preparation. Counseling is available but usually has been separated out instead of being an integral part of the program. Preventive counseling, such as helping students cope with the choices and decisions they must make as they complete their developmental tasks, has not been available, nor have counselors been trained effectively to do this. Consequently, one often hears the terms *developmental* and *career guidance*, only to discover it is a watered-down, paper-and-pencil, once-over-lightly session that is seldom remembered by the student. Adkins asserted that a fifth curriculum (Life Skills) was needed. He envisioned a curriculum that runs parallel with other programs such as reading and math and is life-problem centered. This curriculum deals with predictable developmental tasks, crises, and problems faced by students at different stages of their lives. These developmental problems are filled with emotion and therefore difficult to solve.

The assertion by Adkins that a fifth curriculum (Life Skills) was needed that runs parallel with other programs such as reading and math has been incorporated into the program of the Benton Harbor Workforce Center and it is believed that this has been integral to the Center's success.

There are many ways to judge the success of such programs. Based on data which is presented in later sections it is clear that the program has been very successful. When a program is successful in helping individuals who are at risk obtain work, it is important to analyze the following questions:

1. Why Was the Program Needed?
2. How Is the Program Structured?
3. What Are the Results?
4. Why Did the Program Work?
5. How Could the Program Be Made Better?

The remainder of this paper will be organized to respond to these five questions. The response to question 2 "How is the program structured?" provides an overview of the program's operation and its general approach to curriculum. Additional detail about the program's operation, curriculum and instruction is given in response to question 5 which analyzes why the program worked.

The Need for the Benton Harbor Workforce Development Program

The program is located in Benton Harbor, Michigan which is a Federally designated Weed & Seed area and is Michigan's only state-designated Enterprise Zone. Benton Harbor has the second highest poverty ranking in the State of Michigan. The average per capita income in Benton Harbor is $5,622 per year. 1990 census data reveals that 58% of the city's population is below the poverty level, and nearly 40% of households received some form of public assistance, which includes aid such as Food Stamps, AFDC, Medicaid, SSI and other entitlements. Specifically, the most recent figures from the Family Independence Agency (DSS), shows that 2,152 households receive ADC and 4,673 receive food stamps. The Michigan Employment Security Commission's 1995 unemployment statistics reported an unemployment rate of 33%, when the program began in mid 1995.

The 1990 census shows that 58.5% of families with children under 18 live beneath the poverty level, and three-quarters of single female headed households with children live in poverty. As a result, approximately 71% of Benton Harbor's children live below the poverty level, and in the Benton Harbor Area Schools, 83.6% of the students receive free or reduced lunch. Things are not getting better, as is evidenced by statistics just reported in the local newspaper. An Associated Press release from Lansing, Michigan (1997), reported current rates of unemployment 24%, families below the poverty level 58%, families living on public assistance 45%, students qualified for free and reduced price lunches 90%, more than 400 students missing almost half of the first semester and "large numbers of high school students sent back to school on electronic tether programs after being arrested because jails are full."

Coincident with the high level of economic distress is a high crime rate, heavy abuse and sale of drugs, and household disturbances. ***Benton Harbor's crime rate is three times greater than that of most regions in the country.*** The national crime average is 7,313 per 100,000, the city of Benton Harbor records 21,401 per 100,000. Drug trafficking is one of the most serious problems facing the area; open drug markets plague some neighborhoods, and drive-by and random shootings are regular occurrences. ***In 1994, Benton Harbor had the unfortunate distinction as the murder capital of the nation,*** according to the Associated Press. The rate in 1994 was 156 murders per 100,000 people. This is about 15 times the recent nation averages. Family and domestic violence and assault are also common. Benton Harbor has ranked in the top five areas in the country for violence against women and rapes per capita.

For the 1992-93 school year the graduation rate was only 40.57% of the potential. This is the lowest in the state for any system with a comprehensive high school. The dropout rate was 21.96% for the year, again the highest in the state for any school system as large or larger than Benton Harbor. Steps (Associated Press, 1997) are being taken to place the Benton Harbor school system under state control because of a pattern of low scores on the High School Proficiency Test. The Associated Press (1997) reported "Only 1 percent of students scored at the proficient level in the science test, while 4.1% did so in math, 9.3% in reading and 3.8% in writing." The historic trend has been that the longer the students are in the Benton Harbor school system the further they fall behind state averages. The large percent who fail to graduate (about 60%) and the number who graduate with weak academic skills cannot help but contribute to high unemployment rates, high crime rates, and high poverty rates.

Without question the children, youth, and adults of Benton Harbor are in an at-risk community. Many youth and adults who wish employment have not been able to obtain such because of marginal academic and life skills. The Benton Harbor Workforce Development Center is meeting the need of many who need to improve academic and life skills to a level that makes them employable.

How the Program Is Structured - an Overview

This section provides an overview of the major program components. In the section on why the program succeeded there is more detail about specific program functions and why these were necessary for success.

Program Support, a Collaborative Effort. The Benton Harbor Workforce Skill Development Program is a collaborative effort between Benton Harbor Area Schools, City of Benton Harbor, Cornerstone Alliance, and Andrews University which provides the instructional/counseling staff. The program was funded by a $461,000 grant from the Michigan Jobs Commission with matching contributions of about $200,000 from the City of Benton Harbor and Cornerstone Alliance. The Center was charged with establishing a program to address local workforce development needs.

Program Goal. The goal of the consortium is to support the development of a strong economic development base in the Cornerstone Alliance service area and the Benton Harbor Enterprise Zone by providing a skilled workforce for existing and new businesses.

Program Participants. The program, founded in 1995, originally targeted individuals residing in the Cornerstone Alliance service area, with special emphasis on the Benton Harbor area. While the general target area includes all of Berrien County the primary focus was on Benton Harbor. More than 90% of participants were from Benton Harbor. The typical profile of the trainees includes (but is not limited to):

- Individuals who are under-employed or unemployed.
- Individuals aged 18 or over, with a history of failure in the traditional classroom setting and/or lack a high school diploma.
- Under-employed adults who want to upgrade their skills to enable them to move to higher paying positions.
- Individuals not eligible for other state or federally funded programs.
- Adults and out-of-school youths who have failed to meet entry-level job placement requirements.
- Recent high school graduates who are not going on to a two- or four-year college.

Program Components - 4 hrs/day (2 hrs. of Job Skills and 2 hrs. Life Skills), 5 days per week. The Benton Harbor Workforce Skill Development Program teaches fundamental job-related skills needed to enter and succeed in the workforce. The skills learned include basic technical skills, work human relation skills and life coping skills required to maintain employment.

The Job-specific Applied Skills are learned using a self-paced, multi-media, interactive computer based program titled: *Job Skill Education Program* (JSEP). The JSEP component requires individuals to have at least a fifth-grade math and reading level. Each participant is required to complete a test of basic skills as related to the workplace before being placed into the job specific component of the program. Those ***individuals not meeting the math and reading requirements are referred to supporting agencies*** who can better meet their needs. Once individuals attain the skills necessary to meet the requirements of the program, they can be referred back to the program.

The Life Skills Component of the program is competency based and designed to foster behavioral mastery and attitudinal change. The counseling goals are achieved by instructional means utilizing pre-developed learning programs and resources modified specifically for target groups. Specific training was provided for teachers and counselors in the use of the resources and related procedures. One of the key principles underlying the Life Skills approach is that it is an intervention designed to facilitate students' awareness of the major career development tasks they need to master, and to help them acquire the knowledge and behaviors needed to accomplish these tasks. The Life Skills methodology empowered students by helping them understand how to acquire membership (functional acceptance) in the group. The Life Skills seminars use selected materials developed by Adkins, of Columbia University; selected concepts from training provided the National Council of Black Mayors in combination with materials and exercises developed by the center's instructional and counseling staff.

The Life Skills component includes group participation along with individualized counseling

and mentoring. Some of the specific issues addressed include: time management, maintaining positive attitudes and beliefs, overcoming self-defeating behaviors, financial planning and management, communication skills, teamwork, conflict resolution, problem solving, denial of instant gratification and interview techniques.

Work Ethic Development. In all the program activities there is a focus on helping participants develop a strong Work Ethic. In addition to many planned exercises in the formal curriculum the program environment is used to help develop work ethics. The program is very structured and simulates the work environment. Participants are required to adhere to attendance policies and Center procedures which simulate those found in many workplaces. It is important for those in training to understand the program may not be for everyone. Commitment of participants to the work-like structure of the program helped insure commitment to their jobs.

The Center has developed a workplace simulation in conjunction with the Heath Corporation to help participants identified by Center staff as needing additional training in a work supervised environment. The facility provides a workplace setting where selected participants learn inventory control, inspection, and testing. The simulation provides the staff with the opportunity to observe students' behaviors. Individualized coaching and feedback are used to help the students enhance and apply skills learned in JSEP and Life Skills.

Certification for Employment and Follow-Up. When a participant meets program requirements, he or she receives a certificate that indicates proficiency in the skills required for entry level positions with participating employers. When the trainees are placed with employers, the Center's staff routinely provides follow-up for the first 12 weeks and sometimes for as much as one year.

Measures of Success, Economic and Work Results

The original program graduated 182 individuals of whom 132 (73%) were placed. One hundred sixteen (87.88%) are still working. Since the initial placements others have finished and have been placed. As of February 1997, there were 145 persons from the original and more recent groups who are working. The estimated economic impact of this 145 individuals is $7.00 of base salary and $2.00 per hour of fringe benefits totaling $9.00 per hour per individual flowing into the community. On an annualized basis this means these 145 people bring $2,714,400 into the community ($9.00/hr. x. 2080hr/yr. x 145 people = $2,714,000). When considering economic impact various multiplier factors are used depending on the circumstances. A conservative factor of 2 is used for this estimate which does not consider potential crime reduction effect. The estimated economic impact of these 145 individuals when a multiplier of 2 is used is $5,428,800 per year.

In mid 1995 Benton Harbor when the program started the unemployment rate was 33%. The rate is now about 23%. The 145 individuals which this program brought to an employment status theoretically accounted for about half of the 10% drop. Without question, for a community of this size the impact of the nearly 5% drop in unemployment program that likely relates to this program is remarkable.

The total cost including local support is about $625,000. This means that the annual benefit flowing back to the community is approximately 8 times as much as the original investment with the cost benefits continuing. There were one-time start-up costs that will make the return on investment greater in the future, perhaps as much as 15:1. A comparable, but improved program for 200 participants could be accomplished without the start-up costs for $350,000 to $400,000 per year.

One function of the program which was not initially anticipated was the on-going support individuals seek by returning to the Center for assistance in problem-solving related to challenges they face at work or in their personal lives. This has in many instances resulted in their working through what they felt were issues of unfair treatment in ways that retained their position and helped them view their work situation in more positive terms. Sometimes because of actions they took through coaching that resulted in improving their work circumstances.

As the program hopefully continues this is a dimension that needs to, in at least a limited way, be funded on an on-going basis as a means of retaining work stability for this at-risk population who in the past was unable to get jobs or hold on an on-going basis meaningful employment.

Selected Case Studies. In addition to economic impact there are the human outcomes. Following are selected case studies that help put human meaning to the statistics. Each person represents hurt, joy, failure, and success. Since some of the information provided in these case studies might reflect negatively on individuals or organizations, exact identities have not been used.

Robert. Robert is an African American youth from Benton Harbor. He graduated from high school in 1995. Initial evaluation scores gave a reading level of grade 6.0 and a math level of 6.7. When he left after approximately 12 weeks, the reading level was measured at grade 8.0 and the math level at 8.4. Since leaving, Robert has worked continuously at three different locations. In the first location he was laid off and at that time he returned to the Center for help and was placed at a second location where he worked for four months. There were circumstances surrounding decision-making and taking responsibility that he may not have been totally ready for. Consequently, there was an agreed separation and he was placed at a third location where he has now worked for over one year. Robert's income has steadily increased to where he is now making more than $8.00 an hour with a complete package of fringe benefits. Robert moved out of his mother's home when he took his third job and has developed greater degrees of responsibility. However, because of the economic benefit he has recently moved back with his mother. He has long-term potential and is maturing, but still returns to the Center on his own for advice, support, and coaching. ***There is a continuing need to provide youth like Robert ongoing coaching as they are maturing and becoming more stable contributing citizens of the community.***

Dawnika. When Dawnika came to the center she had a measured reading grade level of 8.7 and a math level of 5.9. When she left, the reading level had increased to 10.9 and the math to 6.4. Dawnika graduated from high school in 1995 and was on public assistance. She has one child. At the time she began the program she was living with her mother. Dawnika completed a ten-week program and was then placed with a subsidiary of a major automotive company. She has now been there more than one year. She now has her own place, has purchased transportation, and is no longer on any form of assistance. Dawnika periodically returns to the Center to bring friends who she believes can benefit from the program. ***One of the most effective ways of finding people who can succeed with the help of the Program has been the referral of past graduates***.

Jose. When Jose first came to the Center he had difficulty communicating, tended to look down, was withdrawn, and dressed in a way that would make it very unlikely that an employer would consider him. Ten weeks later he made a presentation at the graduation exercise where his enthusiasm and articulation excited those in attendance including individuals from the State Employment Commission, the Mayor, and major employers. He began working as a welder at a local technology-based industry. Through interactions with the Center, Jose became aware of an opportunity which paid more and had better benefits. He interviewed and successfully obtained a job with this organization. However, this led to a different type of frustration. He thought initially that

he would be a welder. When he was put into a simpler job involving sandblasting and not given opportunity over time to do welding, he became discouraged, questioned whether or not he might be discriminated against, and began a process of building hostility toward the job. ***Rather than expressing the hostility in ways that he might have in the past which would in all likelihood have resulted in his being terminated, he came to the Center for coaching.*** The Center's staff helped him identify positive strategies for working through the situation and he is now successfully functioning as a welder. He has expressed appreciation on a number of occasions and seems to be happy in his current position which is providing an on-going meaningful wage with benefits. ***The company where he now works has tuition reimbursement and Jose is currently taking advantage of this opportunity to further his skills.*** It appears that Jose is well on his way to establishing himself as a valued employee who is growing technical understanding and skill. Jose has now been employed continuously for approximately one year.

Ed. Ed was a talented person who was in college but lost his support because of a felony. As a result he came to the program for assistance and support. After the completion of the program he was placed in a position where he successfully worked for nine months. Since then ***he has received additional support and help needed to continue his education at the University of Michigan.*** There is an on-going dialogue between the Center and Ed's parents concerning progress and ways to provide mutual support and coaching. During the time that he was working prior to returning to college, he periodically checked back with the Center for support.

Bill. Bill completed high school in 1989. He had been working for five years with temp organizations but unable to find stable employment. When he came to the Center, his measured reading level was grade 9.4 and his math level 7.7. By the time he left he scored at a grade level of 12.1 in reading and 11.2 in math. His family was on his case, expressing that he would never make anything of himself. While at the Center he was punctual and worked extremely hard. Upon completing the program he was placed in a subsidiary of one of the major automotive companies. ***Initially, he had some interpersonal relation difficulties associated with work. However, he consistently checked back with the Center, received coaching, and worked his way through these problems.*** Since then, he has continued to advance to the point where now ***he has a more responsible position which includes having a car at his disposal, traveling to other sites, and receiving special training. He continually checks back with the Center, sometimes just to say hi, I'm still here, I appreciate what you did.***

Terrance. Terrance had been expelled from school for a weapons charge. Terrance with persistence was able to complete a GED but had been unable to obtain employment. When Terrance came to the Center his measured reading level was at grade 8.0 and his math at grade 7.7. When he left the reading level was measured at grade 12.9 and the math at 11.6, a very acceptable level for employment in many more technical jobs. Terrance was a challenge, in part because of emotional problems that had not been resolved with his immediate family. The Center's staff helped him work through these types of problems and gain greater understanding of himself. As this occurred his level of frustration and hostility reduced and he became a far more sociable person. By the time he left the Center he had acceptable social behaviors that increased the likelihood that he could get a job and hold it. Terrance was placed in a subsidiary of the automotive industry which supplies parts to major manufacturers. He periodically worked with the Center when he felt the need and on one occasion as a result of information which came to the Center was asked to come in and talk with the Director. At this time there was discussion and it became apparent that there were some things that he felt were happening to him in his employment that needed improvement. Through interaction with the Center a plan was developed and the circumstances have been resolved so that Terrance is a stable employee.

At this time he has been employed for over a year. **He periodically sends individuals to the Center whom he feels could benefit from a similar program and maintains on-going contact.**

Crime Prevention. There is a dimension of the Center where it is difficult to place a price tag. There are a number of individuals who if they did not receive the type of help provided by the Center, would likely over time become involved with the criminal justice system. For such individuals, rather than bring a positive cash flow into the community the result is a negative cash flow to the state approaching $40,000 to $50,000 per year. ***The proverb, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, aptly fits with many of the maturing individuals who have received help and continue to receive coaching through the Center.***

Why the Program Succeeded

Saying why something worked is tantamount to describing a cause/effect relationship. This is the most difficult type of relationship to establish by research. Unfortunately, sometimes because of this there is a hesitance to examine this question. What follows is not the result of careful experimental research, but rather opinion based upon a synthesis from descriptive statistical data, comments made by participants, observations of staff, and identification of program components which would seem to contribute to success based upon commonsense and instructional/learning theory.

Five Dimensions of the Program's Culture.

There are five dimensions of the Program's culture which are judged as essential to its success. These are: Commitment, Administrative Style, Staffing, Environment, and the Curricular/Instructional processes.

Caring Commitment. A genuine caring commitment is found at all levels. Caring commitment is the vehicle for shared program ownership.

Administrative Style. The administrative style models, communicates, and facilitates the goals and objectives of the program by providing leadership that includes: structured flexibility, bidirectional communication, and participation in decision-making. Group commitment to agreed upon goals and process is key.

Staffing. There is a careful blending of committed staff that include those with high level counseling and instructional skills combined with grassroots community understanding. Human relation, team building, and structured flexibility qualities are considered essential.

Environment. The physical and human environment are shaped to support and reflect the goals of the program. For example, within the physical environment there is attention to neatness, structure, and order. The human environment combines qualities of trust, warmth, listening, compassion, structured flexibility, common sense, and meaningful standards.

Curricular Instruction Process. The curriculum/instructional process identifies where the student is and then uses the most appropriate instructional methods available to move them step-by-step till they meet the technical and life skill curriculum goals. ***Advancement is Based On Achievement*** and occurs in an emotionally supportive and secure environment.

The five dimensions of the program culture: Commitment, Administrative Style, Staffing, Environment, and Curricular Instruction Process umbrella 14 important factors. An examination of the factors shows most factors are a blend of 2 or more of the program cultures' 5 dimensions.

Fourteen Factors Important to the Program's Success.

Fourteen program factors are judged imperative to the program success. Each factor blends multiple dimensions of the Program's culture. The Program's culture is like a personality which affects how each specific factor works. A summary of the factors follows:

1. **Employer Participation in Formulating the Program.** Benton Harbor was declared as an Enterprise Zone. This means employers who move to the area have special tax and other considerations. It was anticipated that doing this would help increase the employment in Benton Harbor. When employers were primarily hiring from outside the area concern was raised by the City and others about not hiring more Benton Harbor residents. Employers indicated there was a lack of preparation of Benton Harbor residents both in basic skills and work ethics. ***This gave employers incentives to participate in formulating the type of program needed based upon local conditions.*** Employers collaborated with Cornerstone Alliance and other agencies designing the general structure for a program that would deal with both fundamental job and technical skills as well as life skills.

2. **Employers' Commitment to Provide Jobs.** Many training programs fail because there is a lack of focus on the types of jobs needed and there is not a plan for individuals to be employed immediately upon completion of the program. ***Employers committed to providing approximately 198 full-time jobs with fringe benefits subject to economic conditions.*** This provided incentives for participants and a focus for job oriented curriculum development.

3. **Staffing.** Staffing was a collaborative effort between the program director and Andrews University. The instructors and counselors were hired by Andrews University. The staff was chosen to provide a careful blend of graduate counseling students with appropriate work experiences and individuals from the community who had an excellent understanding of how to work within the local gestalt. Approximately half of the staff were students from the University. Three were doctoral students working in the area of counseling. Individuals from the community had academic preparation ranging from several years of college to a number who had baccalaureate degrees. The selection sought and found staff who had strong commitments to helping individual participants improve their economic and social conditions. The need for such commitment cannot be stressed too strongly.

4. **Special Staff Training.** All staff was cross-trained prior to the beginning of the program in both life skills and the use of JSEP (Job Skills Education Programs). There were two types of positions. Instructor positions were for staff who primarily worked with the JSEP materials; while, Counseling positions were for those who worked primarily with the life skills seminars. Staff members were scheduled some in both positions to help them better understand the relation of the two major program components. Also, staff worked closely as a team in problem-solving when participants were not succeeding as expected.

5. **Careful Evaluation of Participants.** There was careful screening of participants. ***Evaluation included both identification of where individuals were in reading, math, and other skills important to acquiring a job, and the testing for drugs.*** Anyone who tested positive for drugs was not allowed to participate. However, he/she was referred to drug counseling with the opportunity of being reconsidered when he/she no longer tested positive for drugs. A minimal grade level achievement of grade 5 in reading and math was expected for a person to begin the JSEP training. The TABE (Test of Adult Basic Education), a test used by business and industry for employment screening, was used by the center. When a person was close to the minimum, special help was provided followed by retesting.

6. **TeamworkThroughout the Program.** The concept stressed throughout the program was teamwork. Team approaches included: ***administrative style***; ***staff participation*** in screening and problem solving; and ***participants functioning together*** as a team in the life skills seminars and in helping each other through coaching in conjunction with the computer-based JSEP training. Participants reinforced their understanding as they helped someone else succeed at a computer-based training module. ***Team Approaches were stressed through role modeling, instructional episodes, and in helping activities***.

7. **A Curriculum that Integrated Skill and Emotional Development.** The curriculum integrated cognitive skills important for work success with life skills and emotional support systems. Cognitive and practical skills necessary to succeed on the job, (reading, mathematics, and other skills) were taught within a workplace context. Life skill seminars stressed workplace human relations skills, work ethics, team building, conflict resolution, problem solving, taking responsibility, schedule planning so that family needs such as babysitting were met, planning personal priorities so one could be a dependable self-sufficient worker, etc. Work and life skills were approached in ways that built an emotional support culture that helped participants feel free to interact with the staff for coaching or advice and to value helping each other. The life skills seminars used curriculum materials developed by Adkins (1985), The National Council of Black Mayors (1996), and other material prepared by the staff. Initially, the materials used were primarily those acquired from Adkins and the Council of Black Mayors. As the staff became better acquainted with the needs of the community and the individuals they developed their own curriculum which used the previous materials when appropriate.

8. **Instruction Began Where a Person Was and Went Step-by-step.** Instructional Approaches might be summarized by the following One-Liners: Evaluate, Plan, Instruct, Practice (EPIP...EPIP...); Advancement Based on Achievement; Simple to Complex; Concrete to Generalization to Application; Use Practical Examples to Teach Skills; Help Each Other; Practice What You Teach - Be a Role Model; Use Students to Help Students; and Integrate the Cognitive with the Emotional. All of these approaches are used by JSEP and/or the Life Skills Seminars.

   JSEP, a computer-based program, uses modules on specific job-related skills to also enhance basic reading and math capabilities. This provides real examples to help a person understand the work process, acquaints them with applications they may encounter on the job, and has them use what they have learned to solve work type problems (Concrete to Generalization to Application; Use Practical Examples to Teach Skills) . JSEP is competency-based so that a person must pass criterion reference examinations with at least an 80% accuracy (Advancement is Based on Achievement). When an individual repeatedly failed to meet this, instructors worked with them on a personal basis to try to determine why they were not succeeding and remediate the problem.

   Emotional support occurred in many ways. It occurred because of the openness of the Life Skills seminars where people helped each other with real life problem solving. What was being taught about working together was being demonstrated by the staff (Practice What You Teach - Be a Role Model). It happens when structure and expectations are combined with compassion and a willingness to consider a person's reason for not meeting an appointment or failing to meet an expectation.

The total gestalt of the Center is a critical part of the curriculum. Individuals were told to view what they were doing as though it was a job. They had time cards they used for checking in and out. Attendance was kept in a rigorous way and failure to comply with meeting appointments was dealt with in a way that was comparable to what they would expect when they received a job. Responsibility was repeatedly stressed along with the ability to problem-solve without losing one's temper. (Practice What You Teach - Be a Role Model; Concrete to Generalization to Application; Use Practical Examples to Teach Skills...)

9. **Multidimensional Communication is an Expectation.** Communicate, Communicate, COMMUNICATE! Throughout the program from the first interview of the potential participants through job placement communication is key. The communication said what was expected in terms of their commitment, behavior, meeting appointments, and every aspect of the program. Communication continued throughout the program about what employers expected. Finally, they were coached in becoming effective communicators in terms of problem solving, in terms of presenting themselves to employers, and in terms that would not raise unnecessary hostility.

   The Center's approaches to Communication is a unifying theme that is the heart of making things work; it is an approach designed to be effective, warm, and non-hostile. It involves words, body language, and actions (Practice What You Teach - Be a Role Model). There was traditional communication training and more. There was a continued focus by staff in providing effective communication as well as eliciting effective communication from the participants. The sensitive communication taking place meant that there had to be a gestalt of trust because real problems would not be expressed without this. It required fairness, consistency, as well as the perception that staff wanted a person to succeed even when he/she had to be removed temporarily from the program. When people were removed it was done in a way that gave them the feeling that when they solved certain problems they could return. There was even help in solving the problems while participants were away. This happened through referrals and an ongoing open communication.

10. **The Development of Emotional Strength.** This has been mentioned earlier as part of the curriculum but it is so important that it is identified separately along with approaches that made it possible. These approaches included listening and hearing (More Communication!) what participants had to say. This happened in many ways including the Life Skills Seminar as well as individual times when participants sought out instructors or counselors to express specific needs and problems. It was part of an atmosphere, an openness, when no question was considered dumb. No need was considered unreasonable.

    Procedures that helped formulate this gestalt included support group procedures of the Life Skills Seminar. Problem solving of open-ended work and social situations (real personal problems) was done in groups as well as by individuals. The presentation by individuals of their ideas and solutions to problems was valued. Case studies including short motion pictures and role playing involving realistic issues that confronted many of the participants in their community were used to start decisions about feelings. Sometimes these situational problem-solving case study/role playing events were videotaped and the participants critiqued themselves.

    The emotional development and support resulted in a bonding for many participants where they continue to seek coaching, problem-solving advice, and general support after leaving the Center and joining the workforce. They have learned that rather than blow up they should

come and talk to somebody. It was communicated by word and deed that staff cared and would always be there to help so long as the program continued.

11. **Support Among Participants that was Fostered, Recognized, and Encouraged.** The concept of helping one another was fostered in many ways and contributed to the academic success, emotional health and social development (Use Students to Help Students). When individuals were particularly gifted in an area, they were used to support other participants who had less skill. This fostered a concept of mutual support as well as the recognition that everyone has something to contribute to their environment. When an individual was doing well in a particular area using JSEP and another participant was having difficulty and the instructor may not have enough time, it was not unusual to suggest that one participant assist the other. Also, participants came to the place that they discussed real problems with each other as well as with the staff.

12. **On-going Staff Development and Program Modification.** There was a continued process for reviewing what was happening. Getting feedback from employers, participants, and staff concerning how they felt things were going as well as gathering statistical information. This was used to identify areas where improvement in the program might take place as well as areas where staff might need additional training. It was not unusual to take a Friday afternoon for staff to meet for problem solving and training activities. Various staff members have different skills and backgrounds. Staff who have lived in Benton Harbor for many years are keenly aware of needs and feelings of the community. This awareness is used in helping staff with less background understand how to relate with greater sensitivity to the problems confronting participants and how best to address these through the program.

13. **Special Coaching to Help Participants Acquire and Hold Jobs.** Near the end of the program as well as throughout the program there was a focus on getting ready to get a job. This included helping participants understand what was a good resume, how to write one, and eventually writing their own resume. In addition there was help on how to have a successful job interview including: How do you dress? How do you sit? What does body language communicate? What about eye contact? Etc. There was a continued emphasis on coaching job behaviors as participants got ready to become part of the job market. Participants were repeatedly urged not to make fast decisions based upon an emotional outburst but rather to take their time, get counsel, find a strategy, work out the problem. This type of coaching that is highly specific to being successful in the job environment paid off over and over again as participants came back to receive help for perceived job-related human relation problems, discrimination, or unfair practices. Sometimes they became aware that what they thought was unfair really had a reason. At other times they obtained strategies that helped them receive greater consideration and be promoted to more responsible positions.

14. **Consistency, Consistency, CONSISTENCY!** From the beginning to the end there was an attempt to provide caring consistency. Once communicated expectations were followed up. For example, attendance and punctuality policies were communicated and followed-up. The actions paralleled what participants would expect if they were in a real job. It means consistency by each staff member and between staff members. It means participants cannot play off one staff member against another. It means you get what's promised.

Opportunities for Improvement--A Program Wish List

Much has been learned in the initial success which could build a still stronger program. Some of the improvements can be done with little cost while others might require capital expenditures to improve the environment. These suggested improvements are given without consideration to order or cost. They include:

1. Greater resources for follow-up support of individuals as they move and continue in the workforce -- Improved "home base" counseling and coaching resources.

2. Additional software which can deal with a broader level of skills and more specific manufacturing instructional needs.

3. Recreational resources which might be as simple as an exercise room but could ideally include much more. At times strenuous physical activity can be used to reduce stress and anxiety.

4. Transportation to help participants get to the program and later on, get to work until they obtain enough money to buy their own transportation.

5. Child care services at the Center so participants can bring their children with them. It could also provide some in-service training for selected participants who might later obtain childcare jobs and help participants better understand effective parenting.

6. A materials resource center with a variety of multimedia study materials, videos, audio tapes, and reading material that can help develop: life skills, positive role models, health skills, parenting, job specific knowledge and skills, etc.

7. Effective ways to work more closely with schools to assist disinfranchised youth who are no longer allowed to attend school even though there is still a desire to get an education.

8. Broadened on-going participatory support systems/networks for each trainee through structures such as family, neighbors, churches, friends, mentors, Center staff, etc...

The success to date is remarkable in terms of cost benefits but even more so in terms of positive human outcomes. The experience and understanding gained through this program can serve as a pilot for other workforce development partnerships. The importance of a broadened curriculum that includes life skills and emotional support structures has been demonstrated.

It is hard to learn when you are hungry. It is equally hard for people to have positive change when they are emotionally hungry. Positive changes usually need more than cognitive or psychomotor skills training. There needs be desire and commitment. But, this usually will not happen unless there is emotional support surrounding the person who needs to change.

This project needs to be the beginning of a continuing process that creates the desire and opportunity for lifelong learning among the at-risk youth and adults of Benton Harbor.

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